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287

NATIONAL INTELLIGENCE ESTIMATE

CHINESE COMMUNIST
INTERVENTION IN KOREA



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SECRET

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The intelligence organizations of the Departments of State, the Army, the Navy, and the Air Force participated in the preparation of this estimate and concur in it. This paper is based on information available on 6 November 1950.

SECRET

CHINESE COMMUNIST INTERVENTION IN KOREA

THE PROBLEM

1. To estimate the scale and purpose of Chinese Communist intervention in North Korea and Chinese Communist capabilities and intentions.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

2. Present Chinese Communist troop strength in North Korea is estimated at 30,000 to 40,000. Chinese Communist ground units are engaging UN forces at various points ranging from 30 to 100 miles south of the Korean-Manchurian border. Recent action has been marked also by the appearance of Soviet-type jet fighters in combat with US aircraft over Korea.

3. Present Chinese Communist troop strength in Manchuria is estimated at 700,000. Of this number, there are at least 200,000 regular field forces. These troop strengths, added to the forces already in Korea, are believed to make the Chinese Communists capable of: (a) halting further UN advance northward, through piecemeal commitment of troops; or (b) forcing UN withdrawal to defensive positions farther south by a powerful assault.

4. The objective of the Chinese Communist intervention appears to be to halt the advance of UN forces in Korea and to keep a Communist regime in being on Korean soil. In accomplishing this purpose, the Chinese Communists would: (a) avert the psychological and political consequences of a disastrous outcome of the Korean venture; (b) keep UN forces away from the actual frontiers of China and the USSR; (c) retain an area in Korea as a base of Communist military and guerrilla operations; (d) prolong indefinitely the containment of UN, especially US, forces in Korea; (e) control the distribution of hydroelectric power generated in North Korea and retain other economic benefits; and (f) create the possibility of a favorable

political solution in Korea, despite the military defeat of the North Koreans.

5. The Chinese Communists thus far retain full freedom of action with respect to Korea. They are free to adjust their action in accordance with the development of the situation. If the Chinese Communists were to succeed in destroying the effective strength of UN forces in northern Korea, they would pursue their advantage as far as possible. If the military situation is stabilized, they may well consider that, with advantageous terrain and the onset of winter, their forces now in Korea are sufficient to accomplish their immediate purposes.

6. A likely and logical development of the present situation is that the opposing sides will build up their combat power in successive increments to checkmate the other until forces of major magnitude are involved. At any point in this development, the danger is present that the situation may get out of control and lead to a general war.

7. The Chinese Communists, in intervening in Korea, have accepted a grave risk of retaliation and general war. They would probably ignore an ultimatum requiring their withdrawal. If Chinese territory were to be attacked, they would probably enter Korea in full force.

8. The fact that both the Chinese Communists and the USSR have accepted an increased risk of a general war indicates either that the Kremlin is ready to face a showdown with the West at an early date or that circumstances have forced them to accept that risk.

SECRET

DISCUSSION

9. Actual Development of Intervention to Date.

Prior to mid-October, Chinese Communist support of the North Koreans consisted solely of logistical aid and moral support. Since that time, however, the Chinese Communists have been committing troops in increasing number so that at present UN forces are being engaged by Chinese Communist ground units in varying penetrations, ranging from 30 to 100 miles south of the Manchurian-Korean border.

To date, elements taken from the Chinese Communist 38th, 39th, 40th, and 42nd armies of the Fourth Field Army have been identified in the combat zone of Korea. Units of approximately battalion size from each division of three or more of the Chinese Communist armies along the Korean border in Manchuria have been combined to form units of approximately division size. One regular Chinese Communist division has been tentatively identified. Present Chinese Communist troop strength in North Korea is estimated to number from 30,000 to 40,000. This number, combined with an estimated 45,000 North Korean troops, constitutes an over-all enemy strength of 75,000 to 85,000. Of this total, an estimated 52,000 are in contact with UN forces.

The arrival of Chinese Communist ground units in the Korean fighting has been accompanied by a marked stiffening of North Korean resistance. The previously confused and disorganized North Korean units now appear to be in process of recommitment as reorganized and re-equipped combat units. There are indications that Chinese Communist forces in Korea are being reinforced.

Although the nationality of the hostile aircraft involved in recent incidents over the Korean-Manchurian border has not been definitely established, the fact that Soviet-type jet aircraft were involved indicates that the North Koreans are receiving air assistance from Manchuria in addition to direct ground force support from the Chinese Communists.

10. Chinese Communist Capabilities for Armed Intervention.

The over-all strength of the Chinese Communist ground forces is estimated at 2,800,000. Of this number, 1,770,000 are well-trained and well-equipped regular field forces, and the remainder are fairly well-trained and well-equipped military district troops. In addition, there are approximately 2,000,000 poorly-trained and poorly-equipped provincial troops.

Since spring 1950, there has been a general build-up of Chinese Communist tactical troop strength in Manchuria to a point which exceeds normal security needs. The movement of numerous major units from south and central China is estimated to have brought current Chinese Communist strength in Manchuria to approximately 700,000. Of this number, there are at least 200,000 regular field forces, comprising possibly eight to ten armies, plus elements of at least four other armies.

The Chinese Communist Air Force, not tested in combat to date, is believed to consist of 200 combat aircraft in tactical units. Of this 200, 40 are TU-2 light bombers, 40 are IL-10 ground attack, and 120 are LA-9 fighters. It is possible that the CCAF may include 30-40 Soviet-type swept-wing jet fighters formerly stationed in the vicinity of Shanghai, some of which are believed to have been the jet aircraft which have appeared in recent operations in North Korea.

With these ground forces and this air strength, the Chinese Communists could probably make available as many as 350,000 troops within 30 to 60 days for sustained ground operations in Korea and could provide limited air support and some armor. This could be done without jeopardizing their internal control in Manchuria or China proper. The Chinese Communist Forces are therefore believed capable either of: (a) halting further UN advance northward by matching any foreseeable

SECRET

UN build-up with piecemeal commitment of forces presently along the Yalu River; or (b) forcing UN withdrawal to defensive positions further south through a powerful assault.

11. Chinese Communist Motives for Intervention.

The Chinese Communist decision to commit troops in North Korea, entailing as it does the serious risk of widening the Korean conflict, would not have been taken by Communist China without Soviet sanction or possibly direction. It must therefore be assumed that both parties consider the anticipated benefits to justify the acceptance of the calculated risk of precipitating a general war in China which could eventually involve the Soviet Union. This calculated risk includes the possibility of a reaction on the part of the US directly to meet the broader issue with the USSR rather than to allow itself to become involved in an expensive and indecisive war with Communist China.

The immediate occasion for Communist Chinese armed assistance appears to have been the crossing of the 38th Parallel by US forces and the consequent swift collapse of North Korean resistance. Unless the Chinese had intervened, UN forces would soon have reached and secured the Yalu River line. The Korean People's Republic would have ceased to exist except as a government-in-exile and as a guerrilla movement. Confronted with this possibility, the Chinese Communists have apparently determined to prevent an early UN military victory in Korea and to keep a Communist regime in being on Korean soil.

It is significant that the Chinese Communists refrained from committing troops at two earlier critical phases of the Korean war, namely when the UN held no more than a precarious toehold in the Pusan perimeter and later when the UN landings were made at Inchon. The failure to act on those occasions appears to indicate that Peiping was unwilling to accept a serious risk of war, prior to the US crossing of the 38th Parallel. Since the crossing of the Parallel, Chinese Communist propaganda has increasingly identified the Peiping cause with the cause of the North Koreans.

The immediate objective of the Chinese Communist intervention in Korea appears to have been to halt the advance of UN forces. Chinese Communist military operations to date, including the nature of the forces employed, suggest an interim military operation with limited objectives. This view is strengthened by consideration of the limitations imposed on military operations by winter weather in this mountainous area.

In assisting the North Koreans, the Chinese Communists can derive several advantages for themselves, the Soviet Union, and world Communism. They are:

a. To avert the psychological and political consequences of a disastrous outcome of the Korean venture.

The prestige of the world Communist movement and, more particularly, the domestic and international political position of the Chinese Communist regime, are linked with the fate of the North Korean satellite. A complete UN victory in Korea would adversely affect the power of international Communism to attract and hold adherents. For the Chinese regime itself, the total elimination of a satellite state in Korea would mean a serious loss of political face in China and in the world at large, most notably in the Asiatic areas that have probably been selected by the Chinese Communists as their primary sphere of influence.

b. To keep UN forces away from the actual frontiers of China and the USSR.

The establishment of a Western-oriented and US-supported regime on the south bank of the Yalu River is probably viewed by Peiping as a threat to the security of the Communist regime in China. The USSR would likewise be sensitive to the advance of UN forces to the northeastern tip of Korea. The Chinese Communists apparently regard the US as a hostile power, determined to bring about their eventual overthrow.

c. To retain an area in Korea as a base of Communist military and guerrilla operations.

The terrain of North Korea adjacent to the Manchurian border is especially suitable for such a base.

SECRET

d. To prolong indefinitely the containment of UN, especially US, forces in Korea.

Prolonged involvement of UN and US forces in Korea is favorable for Communist global strategy. The containment of these forces in Korea prevents their redeployment to Germany, or to other areas where they might be required to oppose Communist aggression.

e. To control the distribution of hydroelectric power generated in North Korea and retain other economic benefits.

Peiping has an immediate economic stake in the preservation of a friendly state south of the Yalu. The hydroelectric installations in North Korea, particularly the Suiho plant, are important sources of power for South Manchuria. The port of Antung in Manchuria is part of an economic entity that embraces the Korean city of Sinuiju across the river; trade in the area would be hampered severely if no arrangements existed for the operation of the Antung-Sinuiju port as a single unit. River traffic on the Yalu and the Tumen rivers is dependent upon workable agreements between political authorities in Manchuria and Korea.

f. To create the possibility of a favorable political solution in Korea, despite the military defeat of the North Koreans.

It is possible that the Chinese Communists and the USSR hope to establish a military situation that will make the UN willing to negotiate a settlement of the Korean conflict in preference to a long drawn-out and expensive campaign.

12. Possible Developments.

The Chinese Communists thus far retain full freedom of action with respect to Korea. They are free to adjust their actions in accordance with the development of the situation. Their current violent propaganda—centering as it has on (a) the “will of the Chinese people” (rather than the government) to supply “people’s volunteers” to aid the North Koreans and “defend China”; and (b) America’s “use of Japanese” and “aping of Japan” in its “aggression against China”—is excellently adapted for preserving maneuverability. It could mean equally: whipping up of public opinion that seems chilly toward any Korean

venture; a part of a general war of nerves; a real intention to organize an anti-UN military campaign on a “people’s volunteer” basis; or a psychological preparation of the Chinese people for hostilities with the US, if not a world war.

If the Chinese Communists were to succeed in destroying the effective strength of UN forces in northern Korea, the Chinese Communists would probably pursue that advantage as far as possible, bringing in reinforcements from Manchuria to exploit the opportunity.

If the military situation is stabilized, the Chinese Communists might well consider that, with advantageous terrain and the onset of winter, their forces now in Korea are adequate to prevent a military decision favorable to the UN, at least until spring. Such a military deadlock would contain UN forces in Korea and expose them to attrition. It would also permit the reconstitution of North Korean forces and facilitate the development of guerrilla operations behind the UN lines. In these circumstances, the possibility of a political solution as the most convenient means of bringing the situation in Korea to a conclusion would be increased.

A likely and logical development of the present situation is that the opposing sides will build up their combat power in successive increments to checkmate the other until forces of major magnitude are involved. At any point in this development the danger is present that the situation may get out of control and lead to a general war.

The Chinese Communists appreciate that in intervening in Korea they have incurred grave risks of retaliation and general war, but have accepted the risk. They would probably ignore a UN ultimatum requiring their withdrawal. If Chinese territory were to be attacked, they could and probably would enter Korea in full force, with the purpose of expelling UN forces altogether.

The fact that both the Chinese Communists and the USSR have accepted an increased risk of a general war indicates either that the Kremlin is ready to face a showdown with the West at an early date or that circumstances have forced them to accept that risk.

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